



A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
COVERING VIDEO GAMES, ANIMÉ,
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ON SCREEN CHAOS



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nWo**

**Neal "Buff" Mulcahy
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Mike "Hall" Troupe
Shawn "Nash" Dumas
Tony "Hennig" Morse**



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ON SCREEN CHAOS IS THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ON SCREEN SOCIETY. FOUNDED IN JULY, 1997 AS ON SCREEN, DEDICATED TO THE REVIEW AND ENJOYMENT OF VIDEO GAMES, JAPANESE ANIMATION, AND OTHER RELATED TOPICS. ON SCREEN CHAOS IS COPYRIGHTED ©1998 BY THE ON SCREEN SOCIETY. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. THIS DOCUMENT AND ITS CONTENTS MAY BE FREELY DISTRIBUTED IN PAPER OR ELECTRONIC FORMAT PROVIDED THAT: A. NO FEE OF ANY KIND IS CHARGED FOR ITS DISTRIBUTION, AND B. PROPER CREDIT IS GIVEN TO THE AUTHOR(S) AND/OR ARTIST(S) AND THIS PUBLICATION.

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WELCOME!

Hello again, and welcome to another issue of *On Screen Chaos*! We seem to still be in quite the lull around here, with no decent new games or even anime scheduled to be released anytime in the near future.

Despite all that, our cohort Svenyip either got really inspired or really bored, and flooded the head offices with a heap o' reviews, including his brand new fansub column; and reviews for games for the (ugh) N64.

Which freed yours truly up to do more pretty artwork for the newsletter, and as a special added bonus, I've included a reprint from our own comic masterpiece, *Neo Life*, just for you! (yay!) Plus, brother Xot takes us on a little stroll down memory lane with a little story about his early collecting days.

So, enjoy the chaos and once again, thanks for hangin' with the clique.

-SHAWN "THE SHRED-MAN" DUMAS
On Screen Columnist

Break out your Rumble Pack for Wheel of Fortune 64!

System: Nintendo 64
Publisher: GameTek
Release Date: December, 1997

MICHAEL "SVENYIP" TROUPE
On Screen Correspondent

Okay, you might be asking yourself, *why* did I bother to write comments about *Wheel of Fortune* for the Nintendo 64, of all games? Well, this game is a prime example of how some people feel that if the technology exists, it *has* to be used.

I'm talking specifically about the Rumble Pack accessory. Yes, *Wheel of Fortune* is Rumble Pack compatible. Every time your character spins the wheel, it will shake to "simulate the effect." If I remember correctly, it will also shake when the crowd cheers your victory.

The game itself, however, isn't really much better than any other version of *Wheel of Fortune* that has been released since the original Nintendo. Just how much can you do to make a game like this interesting, anyway? There *is* a surprising amount of voice in it for a cartridge game (players don't, naturally, say the names of the puzzles when they announce they'd "like to solve the puzzle"), but some of it is crudely timed, especially when the game informs you that "I'd like to buy a vowel A!" without any pause between the statement and the letter.

It would have been nice if they included the option to save puzzles seen, either to the cartridge itself or to a memory card. Unfortunately, you're at the whim of the randomness of the game, so it's possible to see the same puzzle twice in a row at any point.

So, for a system that has less than fifty games available, paying \$60 for a copy of *Wheel of Fortune* is a joke. You'd have just as much fun buying a used copy for the original Nintendo for a couple dollars. Jeopardy should also be out for the N64 by the time you read this, which leads me to wonder - will they have Jeopardy make the controller shake every time your character buzzes in to give a response?

Xot's

CLASSIC CORNER

Perspectives on Retrogaming

STELLAR TRACK

Classic *Star Trek*
style action wrapped
up in an interesting,
all-text adventure



System: Atari 2600
Publisher: Sears Tele-Games
Release Date: 1980

TONY "XOT" MORSE
On Screen Editor

At first glance, *Stellar Track* is a jumble of text and numbers that really don't make too much sense. But thanks to the History of Home Video Games Homepage (<http://www.sponsor.net/~gchance>), I was able to download the manual, interpret the jargon, and discover a really cool, addictive game.

Stellar Track is one of three games released only under the Sears label (there is no Atari equivalent). One theory suggests that the reason for this was that Atari intended to market this game under a *Star Trek* title, and failed to get the license. This makes perfect sense, once you get some background on the story. "*Stellar Track*" sounds kind of like *Star Trek*, and the story mirrors *Trek* almost perfectly: "Aliens" visit the planet Earth to trade warp drive for Earth's science and art to revitalize their stagnant culture. Eventually, the "Aliens" fear that their place of dominance in space is threatened, and they go to war.

Obviously, the first set of aliens is the Vulcans and the second the Klingons. But since all alien races are only referred to as "Aliens," it sounds like Starfleet (mentioned by name) has gone to war with Vulcan. It's a neat idea if you're a *Star Trek* fan. I have found myself blowing up several alien ships with war cries mocking Vulcan catch

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World Tour provides mindless 4-player enjoyment



System: Nintendo 64

Publisher: THQ

Release Date: November, 1997

MICHAEL "SVENYIP" TROUPE
On Screen Correspondent

WCW vs. NWO: World Tour has been out for a little while now, but I figured I'd played enough of it to give a decent review of it. (Especially because it's a much better game than the newer *WCW Nitro* for the Playstation – avoid that game like the plague.)

Once again, the Nintendo 64 uses its only prime advantage to good use – the ability to play four player simultaneous. Even if you've never played the game before, you can generally enter into the four player Battle Royal mode and have fun kicking, punching, chopping and throwing the other players.

The game uses an engine very similar to the one used in *WCW vs.*

the World, an earlier Playstation game. Generally, the longer you hold a button down before releasing it, the more powerful an attack you'll do. Once you have locked up with an opponent, you can do six different powerful moves, around four different weak moves, or two "from behind" moves. There are also your standard turnbuckle moves, and a wide selection of weapons you can grab from the outside fans to use on unwary opponents outside the ring.

While your life meter is more or less invisible, you can judge how well you're doing by checking your Spirit meter. Performing powerful moves or taunting your opponent successfully will increase your meter, while hitting an opponent with weak strikes will increase *their* meter. Holds such as sleepers or being hit by weapons repeatedly outside the ring will rapidly deplete your Spirit meter.

When your meter is full, you have a "signature move" that you can perform, as well as a powerful back suplex that you can perform from behind. In addition, you're invincible during this time – you will still take damage, but cannot be defeated until your Full Spirit gauge is used up (which takes about half a minute).

All in all, though, it's just a fun game. It's fun to play as The Giant

against three smaller wrestlers and just chokeslam each of them into oblivion. Or, on the other side of the fence, you can play as Rey Mysterio Junior and somehow be able to body slam and toss around the heavier members of WCW or the NWO. Or even if you just want to have "classic" Hulk Hogan fight the NWO version in a "battle of the Hulksters," *WCW vs. NWO* can do that too.

So even if you're just a casual fan of wrestling, *WCW vs. NWO* is worth taking a look at, especially if you have four controllers and three other friends who are fans of the sport.

Apparently, though, the Japanese version of the game is superior to the American, having added wrestlers from ECW and the WWF, as well as famous Japanese wrestling stars. Most of the names have been changed, but the game lets you rename all the fighters – in English as well – and save all the changes to the game itself rather than the American version which requires a memory card to do any saving. You also can't change the names in the American version.

If all goes well, the rental store I work for will get a copy of the Japanese version somewhere down the line. If they do, I'll be sure to post a review at some point in the future.

Eidos delivers with another must-rent title

Fighting Force provides Double Dragon-style action in a 3-D package



System: Sony Playstation

Publisher: Eidos

Release Date: November, 1997

MICHAEL "SVENYIP" TROUPE
On Screen Correspondent

Fighting Force is a great example of a great game to rent, but one that you probably wouldn't want to buy.

It was made by Eidos, the same people that are responsible for the Tomb Raider series as well as other lesser-known titles, and that influence can be seen through the artistic style of the game.

While the game raves about "dozens of moves per character," the game rapidly ends up turning into button mashing in its purest form. It's very similar to old brawling games like Double Dragon or Streets of Rage. *Fighting Force*, however, is drawn in 3-D, so that makes the moving style take a bit of getting used to.

Once you've learned how to walk, though, you'll be performing the punch and kick combinations with ease. (Especially since all you really have to do is keep tapping the same button over and over to do a combo.) You'll find that guns do remarkably low amounts of damage, but bazookas are great to clear a path through the enemies. Health restoring items are frequent as well, which is a good thing because you only get one life to get through the game unless you earn continues

while playing.

The game, however, suffers from very limited replay value. While every stage after the first offers two different routes you can take to complete it, you'll find that two players playing the game on Easy difficulty can complete the whole adventure in their first or second attempt. And once you've gone through the alternate paths and played as each of the four different characters, there isn't too much that would make you want to take the game out and play it at a later date – unless you *really* like fighting identical looking punks over and over again.

However, during those first couple of hours, you'll find an enjoyable, well-drawn three dimensional fighting game. Definitely worth a play or two, but worth \$49.99? I don't believe so.

Magic: The Gathering still clinging to life

Duels of the Planeswalkers matches Magic players in the online arena

System: PC / Windows 95

Publisher: Microprose

Release Date: January, 1998

MICHAEL "SVENYIP" TROUPE
On Screen Correspondent

We don't generally write very many reviews on computer games, but I figured this one was worth doing, because not too many people may realize the new options that are included with *Duels of the Planeswalkers*.

Odds are, at some point over the past few years, you've either heard about or dabbled a bit in the collectable card game known as *Magic*. It was a fairly simple concept – drop your opponent's life total to zero by summoning spells and creatures to attack with, and try to prevent your opponent from doing the same by neutralizing or just surviving his attacks. However, the incredible variety of decks that could be constructed to play with, as well as the rarity of the earlier out-of-print cards gave the game incredible replay and trading value.

With the first release of the *Magic* computer game about a year ago, it gave many players the first chance to see and play with many of these earlier cards. It also allowed players to construct decks of any size and play against computer opponents against either pre-created decks or decks they designed themselves. There was even a "quest" adventure game that involved going around a world, winning cards by ante, creating a powerful deck and going to challenge various archmages for rare cards.

But something was missing. No matter how well a computer AI is

made (and after a few patches were added, it played the game surprisingly well), it still paled to the experience of playing against a real, live opponent. Someone that had spent the time to create their own deck, someone to give you grudging respect when your deck annihilated them. And so the computer game, and the "expansion card" disk that was created later, were not as popular as they could have been.

That might have changed now. *Magic*, as a game, is slowly losing its popularity. Having spawned more than eleven new stand-alone and expansion sets, it's amazing it lasted this long. But only the die-hard players are willing to spend the money necessary to get the rare, earlier cards, and those who fight people with these enhanced cards may get disillusioned and stop playing.

However, the beta version of the on-line magic game is up and running. You need either the original *Magic* computer game (which you can probably find at your local game store for \$20 or less now) and a free on-line patch, or the new *Magic: Duels of the Planeswalkers* which is more expensive, but comes with about 80 extra cards and the requirements to play on-line already

included.

To those who have played the game before, though, you'll find it's a totally different world on-line. If you try to reconstruct an old, reliable deck, it's likely to get torn apart. In a game where *everyone* can get access to *all* the cards, a casually built deck will fail against one that was carefully constructed.

Now that the game is on-line, sales for the expansion card disk have soared as well – I picked it up myself after finding out that Multilands were only available through the expansion, for example.

So is this going to be the "Next Generation" of magic? Will people be willing to spend money to get computer expansion after computer expansion, recollecting cards that they've played with before, in an effort to improve their on-line ranking?

Well, if I'm any indication, probably. If you've ever played *Magic* before, you might want to pick up the earlier version of the game and get the patch to play on the internet. There's no charge for using TEN (the service used to play on-line) for *Magic*, and while on-line games are slower than in real life, it's a lot easier to clean up after a game.

"*Magic the Gathering?!
Hmm... Pyrokinesis,
Counterspell, Shivan Dragon,
Jovial Evil, Wrath of God....*"



*What kind of stupid "Magic" is this?
There's no X-ZONE card or anything!!*



*Thanks for
RUINING my
game, Kefka!*



Fushigi Yuugi as close to perfect as possible

Superb fansubbed series marks the debut of Svenyip's new column

MICHAEL "SVENYIP" TROUPE
On Screen Correspondent

This section is a new addition to *On Screen Chaos*. Since I have a very large collection of Fansubbed Animé, I'll be writing a review of one or two series per month.

Fansubs are Animé episodes or series that no American company has decided to pick up and distribute in English, generally because the animé has some beliefs, scenarios or background that wouldn't make as much sense to an American audience as it would to a Japanese one. So people who love animé take the raw Japanese episodes, translate them by themselves, add the fansubs to the footage, and then distribute these tapes to other fans at no more of a cost than the tapes, the shipping, and money to keep the VCRs and other equipment working well.

So partially because I can get the tapes for cheaper (most fansub distributors charge anywhere from \$15 to \$20 for 3 2-hour tapes), partially because I've found some series I really like this way, and partially because it's something to do with my money, I've got somewhere around 70 fansub tapes of various series right now.

Anyway, enough about the history of fansubs. With each review, I'll include the number of episodes and which fansubber was responsible for subtitling it. If a series sounds interesting, you can do a search on Netscape or a similar engine under the fansubber's name and from there find out who distributes them (many fansubbers have various other "companies" that do the actual copying and distributing of the animé they make).

SERIES: *Fushigi Yuugi* ("Mysterious Play" in English)

NUMBER OF EPISODES: 52

FANSUBBER: *Tomadachi Animé*

While my opinion on different animé series changes over time, *Fushigi Yuugi* is probably the fansub I enjoyed the most the first time I saw it. I was able to get the first 28 episodes through other people who had them, and the series was good enough to get me to order the remaining episodes directly through Tomadachi – and it never disappointed me.

Fushigi Yuugi is the story of two young girls, Miaka and Yui, who, while preparing to study for major school exams, happen upon a "reference room" in the library. This room contains a book, "The Four Gods' Sky and Earth," which transports both of them to a different land that closely resembles ancient China.

This realm is split into four quadrants. Each quadrant is ruled by a different emperor, and each worships a different animal god. Miaka soon discovers that she is "Suzaku no Miko," or the priestess of Suzaku, one of the four animal gods. She holds the power, if she can gather the seven seishi (soldiers or warriors) of Suzaku, to summon the animal god physically to this realm and make all her wishes come true. It is also, she will learn, the only safe way she can return to her own world.

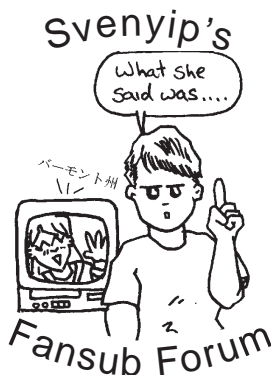
Miaka and Yui soon get separated, though, and Yui finds herself in the hands of the antagonists of the story, Konan country. Konan country has long coveted Kutou country (the country of Suzaku), and has wished to invade and conquer it for quite some time now. They are stronger militarily, and once they learn that Yui is Seiryuu no Miku, they realize that if they can gather all of Seiryuu's seishi first, they can summon Seiryuu and make their own wishes come true.

Over time, Miaka falls in love with the first of Suzaku's seishi, Tamahome. Yui also loves Tamahome, but when he doesn't return her love, she bitterly resents Miaka and supports Nakago, the first of Seiryuu's seishi, because of her anger. Miaka's desire not to hurt Yui impedes her in her quest to find the seishi, an adventure that travels through many lands, many experiences, and many episodes. However, every episode has a purpose in and of itself; there are no episodes that are there only as "filler."

That isn't a very good description of *Fushigi Yuugi*, but if you at all like animé and fantasy adventure, give it a try. Most likely, once you get about a half-dozen episodes into the series, you'll be hooked and will want to see the rest of it. All the characters are richly developed (although the later you meet a character in the series, the less detail and "camera time" you'll see them get).

I should warn you, though, it's *not* always a series for children. There is a goofy sort of humor throughout (not as pronounced as *Dragon Half*, but it has the same sort of serious-to-funny-to-serious attitude at times), and there are also some very powerful, adult, and occasionally painful scenes at times. These, however, just made me like the series even more, as the forces of good do not always "win."

Overall Rating: 9.5 / 10 (Odds are, I'll *never* find anything that I'd give a perfect 10 to, because something could always be better. *Fushigi Yuugi* came close, though.)



New On Screen Fighting Federation Champion crowned!

In a stunning upset on Saturday, March 21, Shawn "The Shred Man" Dumas defeated Neal "Happosai" Mulcahy in the first ever On Screen Fighting Federation Championship title defense.

Neal, who had not defended his belt in over a month, was forced to forfeit three matches in his set, for failing to answer Shawn's challenge within two weeks. But, as it would turn out, Shawn did not need all three victories.

Shawn started out slow, falling to Neal in three straight matches of *Street Fighter Alpha*. But, as per Neal's instructions, Shawn was allowed to decide which games he would take for-

feits in *after* the beginning of the set, and thus, took two wins in *Alpha* and remained alive.

Next, in *Night Warriors*, the combatants chose to play best 3-of-5 matches. In three close, grueling matches, Shawn's mastery of the feline femme fatale Felicia earned him a 2-out-of-3 victory.

Finally, *Samurai Shodown III* began. This was Neal's worst game in the tournament, and it showed, as Shawn handily defeated him in the first two matches.

Congratulations, Shawn, on your victory, and always watch your back... we *all* want what you've got!

Zelda 64 - A Lose/Lose Situation?

The future of the gaming industry may be riding on a single title

MICHAEL "SVENYIP" TROUPE
On Screen Correspondent

You know you're starting to get old when you're working in a video rental/sale store, people come in, look at some old Sega Master System cartridges and ask you, "What are these? Do they work on the Saturn?"

All things considered, though, I'm starting to fear that the old, "classic" style of video games may soon be lost in the eye-catching effects of three dimensional games or full motion video.

Consider *The Legend of Zelda*, for instance. The first *Zelda* game was phenomenal, and while it didn't really have any one element that made it unique from all the other games out there at the time, the combined sum of its parts made a gaming experience that was often imitated, but rarely duplicated. (Although the "Neutopia" series for the Turbo Grafix 16 came close.)

Zelda II, while it was a good game in its own right, didn't feel or play like the first one, and the fans complained. Their voices were heard, as *Zelda III* for the Super NES and the *Zelda* game for the Game Boy both returned to the overhead view and gameplay of the first game. Both did rather well, and many felt that the Game Boy version was the best *Zelda* game overall.

Now, though, *Zelda 64* – the game that could quite literally make or break the Nintendo 64 system at this point – has finally progressed from the rumor state to the "soon to be released in Japan" state, and what few tidbits have been released worry me more than a little.

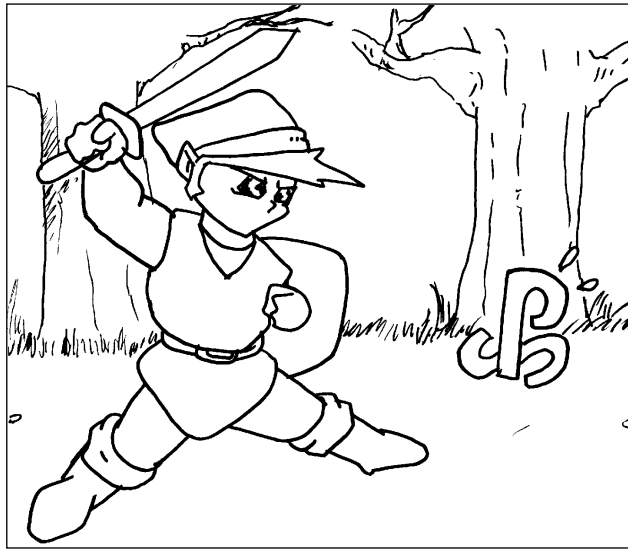
Gaming magazines rave about how the game will be a full 3-D wandering environment similar to *Mario 64*, how the controls might take a while to get used to because they're the same "walk-run" analog controls as *Mario 64*, and comment about the fluidity of Link throwing his boomerang, Link riding a horse – but say *nothing* at all about how the game really plays.

So what does this mean? When *Zelda 64* comes out, if it is as good as people say it is, then that will make the 2-

D adventure game even rarer in the future. Everyone will want to emulate *Zelda 64*'s playing style, which will result in a lot of lackluster 3-D clones and less new gaming ideas, drawing us even closer to the inevitable Second Video Game Crash. If, however, *Zelda 64* is *not* impressive, it is likely to doom Nintendo to permanent status as "second fiddle" to the Sony Playstation. That would not be good for gaming, either, as I've noticed companies always try harder to put out better games when they're involved in stiff competition with a rival game developer.

All in all, *Zelda 64* may well decide the future of games to come. And considering Nintendo's lackluster performance except for a few specific games (such as *Goldeneye*), having such a responsibility lying on Nintendo's shoulders makes me more than a little uneasy ...

The rental store I work at will get a copy of the Japanese version of *Zelda 64* as soon as possible (rumors say it should come out late March), and then I'll post my somewhat biased opinion on how it is.



Special Update: Marvel vs. Capcom

Capcom has finally delivered on the promise of an innovative VS game with the newly released *Marvel vs. Capcom*. This game takes a bunch of new characters from both universes and throws them together in a revamped version of the X-Men vs. Street Fighter engine, and it's outstanding.

One neat feature added to *Marvel vs. Capcom* which almost guarantees that you'll *never* see this game on any of the current home systems is the ability to actually fight with two people at the same time. If you do a half-circle back motion with Fierce Punch + Kick, instead of doing your team super, your other teammate will jump in and you'll take control of him, but the first player will *also* stay on screen for about seven or eight seconds, throwing fireballs and doing whatever he or she can to help. During this time, you also have the ability to perform endless Supers without using any energy.

You also get one of twenty or so "helpers" when you begin each round – this helper can be called in to do a single attack, like a dazzle blast from Dazzler or an E-M Disrupter from

Magneto. It shows an icon of the helper with a number between x4 and x8 just below your life meter, so you must be able to use them multiple times during a fight. These helpers range from completely new and unknown characters to familiar faces from other Capcom titles, like Arthur from *Ghouls & Ghosts*, as well as existing Marvel and X-Men characters. This theoretically makes it possible to have six characters on screen at once.

There are about eighteen characters in the game, nine from each side. Capcom has people like Ryu, Zangief, Morrigan, Mega Man, Strider Hiryu, Chun Li and Captain Commando, along with the completely new character, Jin. Marvel has people like Spider Man, Venom, Captain America, Wolverine, the Incredible Hulk, Gambit and War Machine.

This is one of the most fun games to come out in a while. Mega Man dragon punching Venom's tentacles is a great sight to see. But since it's so new (and so far away), we haven't had sufficient time to analyze the whole thing yet. We'll have a full, in-depth review of this phenomenal title coming up next issue.

Impressive *Virtual On* remains woefully obscure



System: Arcade
Publisher: Sega
Release Date: Unknown

MICHAEL "SVENYIP" TROUPE On Screen Correspondent

This isn't exactly a new game, because it's been out in arcades for quite a while, and the sequel is already out in Japan. But it seems to be a pretty rare game to find, probably because it's rather expensive. (I've heard prices of up to \$20,000 quoted for the two-player sit down model.) However, it gives me a certain amount of hope for the future of arcades, because it shows that there still are some things that the home systems simply cannot do.

Virtual On isn't exactly a fighting game, but it's the closest comparison I can make. You choose between eight different robots, each

with different abilities in maneuvering and three different weapons. Fighting in different 3-D arenas, the game is a best two-out-of-three falls battle between two robots.

The game can get kind of crazy at times, as each of the robots have the ability to dash along the ground and fly up into the air briefly, so strategic use of the terrain, your mech's abilities, and the accuracy and blast radius of each of your weapons are necessary for success.

I had played the game against the computer several different times, and was getting fairly adept at using the Raiden mech. (He's a good choice for a player with little skill like myself, because he has a slow laser attack that can do over half a life bar of damage with a good hit.) But the other night, when I was finally getting brave and deciding to try to play with other mechs, I got into my first two-player battle.

What followed was about three minutes of insane dashing, dodging, jumping and shooting everything but the kitchen sink. While I lost the third round and spent most of my time running away like mad,

each of our fights were rather close, and I can't recall the last time I had as much fun fighting another person in any game.

Maybe it's because the game lets you sit down while you're playing it. Maybe because the two controller setup reminds me a lot of when I used to play *Cybersled* in the arcade. Whatever it is, the simple fact is that they *can't* translate this game to a home system and make it the same experience. I played it on the Saturn at one point, and playing with a single game pad instead of two controllers makes it a much duller game.

So if you can find *Virtual On* in an arcade near you, throw a couple quarters into it and give it a try. Odds are, the intense gameplay and cool music will impress you as much as it did me.



Monster Rancher takes virtual pets to the next level



System: Sony Playstation
Publisher: Tecmo
Release Date: November, 1997

MICHAEL "SVENYIP" TROUPE On Screen Correspondent

Trying to cash in on the "Virtual Pet" craze, *Monster Rancher* is a unique game that lets you guide a pet through life, getting stronger in certain areas depending on the type of work and training you put it through, and then fighting in *Monster Competitions* to provide you with money, your monster with fame, and eventually gain you the coveted rank of Master Breeder.

This is another fun game that looks like it should be unimpressive if you look at the options available. Basically, in a week all you can do is train your monster in seven different jobs, send it off to train in six different activities, let your monster rest, or go off and fight in a tournament. Work gives you a little money and improves your monster in one or two of six different statistics. Training costs a lot, but gives faster stat improvements and might unlock hidden fighting techniques for the monster. Rest is necessary, as a tired monster will not be an effective worker, could die in combat, and might run away if stressed too much.

The fighting itself is rather simple as well. A monster needs will to fight, and the higher the willpower, the better the chance to hit (modified by other stats as well). A move, whether it hits or misses, will drain willpower, and a monster with no will cannot attack and will likely die if KOed at that point. Will recovers at a slow rate, so you have to pick your shots carefully.

But the part of the game that is the neatest is the way that you first acquire your monster. You put in a CD you own, and it reads the number of tracks and length of each track and gives you a monster depending on some unknown formula. You can also "combine" any two monsters you own into a new monster, and get new types that your CDs might not be able to provide. Certain CDs, such as one of the Spice Girls soundtracks, give "ultra rare" monsters that can't be acquired by combining different monsters. So for some people, finding what you can get as a monster may be more entertaining than actually training a monster.

This is another of the rare games that I actually bought a copy of, this one for the rest of the people in my apartment. Since I live with other people who own a Playstation, they were using the copy I bought, I was using the copy from the rental store, and occasionally we'd ask each other odd questions in the early hours of the morning like, "Have you found any CDs that will breed a Pixie/Jell hybrid monster?"

Interest tapered off fast for me after I became a Master Breeder, though, and although there were many other hidden monster types to discover, I soon ended up selling the game. So if you're into games that involve unlocking secrets and changing a *lot* of CDs, give *Monster Rancher* a try. You just might like it.

Xot clears the air about old collecting regrets

TONY "XOT" MORSE
On Screen Editor

This article is a long time in coming, because the events I'm going to describe took place about two years ago. In retrospect, I'm not sure I made the right decision here, and I hope that in writing this I'll come to some sort of conclusion.

Back before retrogaming was 'in' and 'cool,' there were a select few of us who still worshiped the Atari 2600. We would drag our old VCS's out of hiding, hook 'em up and wear 'em out. I was not ashamed to be one of them. When I found out via the Internet that I was not alone, my joy towards retrogaming blossomed, and I began collecting for my long lost love in earnest.

Through classifieds and newsgroup ads, I bought dozens of systems in order to get the games that came with them, along with my two main partners, Pete Larson and Dave Trudeau. (I personally introduced Dave to the retrogaming craze, and one of our greatest achievements was sneaking a VCS into the Electronics Boutique we both worked at, where we routinely disconnected the demo Saturn and had such classics as Enduro playing on the screen, which we jokingly referred to as "Daytona Alpha.") One of our best finds was a box of close to 100 VCS games, and about ten 5200 games, which we stole for a mere \$40. Included in this deal were a double-ender, Congo Bongo, Frankenstein's Monster, and Mr. Do's Castle.

Of course, we sold off our dou-

bles. Usually, we'd take one of those extra systems, clean it up, throw in 10 or 15 carts, and take 35 bucks for it. It kept us going nicely.

But then came the day that "The Store" visited the mall. Every 2600 game, \$1.00 each. Oh my. Between Dave, Pete, and myself, over two or three visits, we scored the following titles: Taz, Atari Video Cube (2 of them), another Mr. Do's Castle, The Earth Dies Screaming, Dice Puzzle, Harbor Escape, Pigs in Space, Tanks but No Tanks, Dodger Cars and the legendary Chase the Chuckwagon, plus a whole bunch of other rares I can't even remember.

Sadly, of these, the only ones I still own are Taz, Dice Puzzle (I *love* this game) and Tanks but No Tanks. You see, I fell victim to greed, and Dave and I sold all but a few of these rares. The biggest sellers, as I recall, were \$171.00 for Chuckwagon, \$41 for Mr. Do's Castle, (I also traded one for the Colecovision version) and \$40 and \$38.50 for the Video Cubes. All together, we made over \$400.00 from a \$35 investment. Dave paid a month's rent. I bought a Playstation. I later sold off a couple more rares – including a blue label Ghostbusters – for much needed cash while between jobs one summer.

I haven't seen or spoken to Dave or Pete in over a year, and now, I continue to regret selling so many rare games. True, most of them sucked; that's why they were rare. But now, two years later, when the only games I ever seem to find that I don't have are Sears variations, I look at my collection, without a single

Ultra Rare in it, and sigh. I'd be over 300 if I still had them. And subsequent trips to that mall oasis's parent store have never again yielded such a gold mine.

I still have my other system gems – Q*Bert's Qubes and Mr. Do's Castle for Colecovision, Pengo for the 5200, Thunder Force 2 for the Genesis – all of which I love to play. And I have a Playstation – with which I now enjoy perfect ports of Robotron, Centipede, Asteroids, Missile Command, Joust, Bosconian, and Super Street Fighter II Turbo, among others.

But faced again with the decision to sell off rares for much needed cash, the answer is a resounding NO. I've trimmed my NES collection down to the bare necessities. I've all but stopped collecting for the Inty. I routinely purge my Saturn and Playstation libraries. But that 2600 collection... that's my baby.

And it feels great to be thrifting again, even if the pickings are slim. And I have (almost) no reservations about buying more than I need. Case in point: Dropping \$15 on a package deal of 30 2600 carts, a Sears Tele Games and 5200 system with 3 games to get Maze Mania and Realsports Soccer. But hey, the 5200 was complete, the controller works, and I can probably unload it after some cleaning and minor repairs.

But the greatest feeling I get comes from knowing that I saved another lot of classic video game memorabilia from the landfill. That's what this hobby is all about. That's what gives me the biggest high.

Dammit, I love these games.

Take on the "Aliens" as you "Track" across the galaxy

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phrases (my current favorite is "Illogical this!")

The game itself reminds me of an old Star Trek simulator I had on my Apple II. It's a text-based game with a 6x6 grid of "quadrants," which are divided into 8x8 "sectors." The goal of the game is to destroy a set number of aliens before you run out of time (measured in Stardates). Warping from quadrant to quadrant takes 1 Stardate per quadrant.

Your weaponry, like in *Trek*, consists of Photon Torpedoes and Phasors. Photons move in a straight trajectory path, and destroy alien ships with one hit. Phasors will hit all aliens in the sector, doing an amount of damage dependent on their proximity to your ship and the amount of

energy you expend on the phasor blast. Long range scans tell you where your enemies and Starbases are, while short range scans call up a map of the sector. Starbases allow you to repair all damage to your ship and restock your supply of photon torpedoes.

The neat addition to this game is that each part of your ship can take damage. You can lose the ability to execute each of your commands, depending on which part of the ship is damaged. While this does make a considerable amount of the game dependent on dumb luck, it also makes the game a lot less static and linear. Plus, it makes you think twice about sucking up tons of damage thinking you can just scoot back to a Starbase: If your launchers are damaged, you'll be left virtually defense-

less, and if your warp drive is hit, you ain't goin' *nowhere*.

The all-text interface, though, is confusing at first, since all directions are indicated by numeric coordinates, and it's not obvious how to read the displays or which numbers correspond to the appropriate directions. This is a game which requires the instructions. It doesn't look or feel like a typical 2600 game, but that's not a bad thing, really, except that some of the novelty wears off if you're playing it on an emulator.

Stellar Track requires a lot more strategy than you might realize at first glance, and I have really gotten hooked on it. If you put some appropriate music on in the background, dim the lights, and can do a decent Shatner impersonation, then you can really get immersed in this game.